



Dulles Direct Newsletter September 2014

Welcome to the September edition of the Dulles Direct Newsletter. I hope the school year is off to a good start for those with children. Commuting wasn't quite as bad as it normally is during back to school time, at least in the morning, thanks to the third lane opening on Route 50. I'll talk a little more about that below.

Speaking of children and traffic, **my third quarter Dulles Direct Town Hall meeting will be on Tuesday, October 7 at 7:00 pm at J. Michael Lunsford Middle School.** I am pleased to welcome School Board Representative Jeff Morse to give a back to school update. Also joining me will be representatives from VDOT and the Loudoun County Sheriff's Office. All of us will be available to answer questions. I know there has been some particular interest in Riding Center Drive (in light of a recent accident) and some incidents of stolen items and vandalism.

Because of those incidents, I want to remind everyone once again: please lock your car doors and your homes! Every night, ask yourself, "is my car locked? Did I leave my phone in my car in plain sight? Is my garage door closed?" While a few of the incidents recently have been break-ins, the vast majority involve unlocked homes and vehicles. We are a safe community overall, but don't push your luck!

If you have any questions on these or any other items, please feel free to contact me by e-mail at matt.letourneau@loudoun.gov. I also provide regular updates on my [Facebook](#) page and if you were forwarded this newsletter and would like to subscribe, you may do so by clicking [here](#).

Legislative

Loudoun Board Becomes First in Board to Adopt Ethics Ordinance

Earlier this month, the Board of Supervisors approved a newly-proposed chapter to the Codified Ordinances of Loudoun County, establishing that the misuse of public assets by any part-time

officer, agent, employee or elected official of Loudoun County government is a crime. Under the ordinance, “any non-full time officer, agent, employee or elected official, who misuses, or permits the misuse of, public assets for private or public purposes unrelated to the duties and office of that person, or any other legitimate governmental interest, when the value exceeds \$1,000 in any 12-month period, shall be guilty of a Class 1 misdemeanor and shall be fined not more than \$2,500 or imprisoned not more than 12 months.” This ordinance was passed by the General Assembly after our Board of Supervisors requested it in last year’s legislative program.

It probably sounds like a no-brainer, but we learned that “part time” elected officials are actually exempt from the law. I’m glad we were able to close this massive loophole, and I’m proud that this entire effort statewide came about as a result of the action that the Loudoun Board took, and that we are the first to adopt it.

Old Arcola Elementary School Building

As I mentioned in last month’s newsletter, Supervisor Clarke brought forward an item to the Board in July to pursue the renovation and repurposing of the Old Arcola School on Gum Spring Road, potentially as a standalone preschool. After considerable discussion, the item was referred to the Board’s Finance and Government Operations Committee and came back before the Board at our September 17 meeting.

As I mentioned, I could not support expending County funds to renovate the building, especially since there are no facilities planned in our Capital Improvement Plan that we need it for, and no funds available to spend on it. I do support exploring private sector interest, and ultimately that is what the Board decided to do. Staff was directed to develop a solicited Public-Private Educational Facilities Infrastructure Act proposal (PPEA) for the Old Arcola Elementary School building and site, to include preferences for: preservation of the building; retention, improvement, or expansion of the athletic field(s); and other creative uses that will benefit the community. PPEA’s allows private entities to "acquire, design, construct, improve, renovate, expand, equip, maintain or operate qualifying projects." By utilizing innovative approaches to financing construction and renovation, these partnerships can save time and money.

As I mentioned before, my primary concerns are that the building requires about \$10 million to restore it to an acceptable condition. The County’s spending \$35 million on the Multipurpose Center Expansion just 2 miles away. In addition, as we all know, Gum Spring Road is severely congested and navigating the intersection of Gum Spring and Evergreen Mills is already a big challenge. I am very hesitant about adding any kind of use which will bring more cars into this intersection on a daily basis (such as a preschool). So, we’ll see what kind of interest exists in the private sector and consider our options.

FY 2016 Preliminary Budget Guidance

Work has begun on the FY2016 budget. The Finance Committee received our first look at FY2016 revenue and it was not a particularly encouraging picture. I will preface this by saying that the first quarter revenue outlook is always the worst. However, the bottom line is that we’re

currently running about \$20 million under last year's revenue intake. If that were to hold—and I hope it doesn't—it will be some real challenges to fund school and County budgets.

The Board also gives the County Administrator preliminary fiscal guidance. I think that too much is made by some out of the Board's fiscal guidance, because it is simply a starting point for the budget. I generally think it is logical to start at something between the equalized tax rate (a rate that means homeowners would pay about the same as last year) and the current numerical rate. It doesn't make any sense to try to project the cost of enhancements into the fiscal guidance—it is too early to know. This year, the Board found itself deadlocked between starting at the equalized rate and the current rate of \$1.155. In order to break the deadlock (2 separate motions failed on 4-4 votes, with one Supervisor absent), I moved that the Administrator prepare his budget based on both, and that motion passed.

Also included as part of the guidance was a motion to pursue a revenue sharing agreement with Loudoun County Public Schools. The idea would be to have a percentage agreed upon in advance over a multi-year period in order to give better clarity to each side as to what the amount will be. I'm not sure how significant this would really be, as the haggling that takes place is generally about the tax rate and not about the percentage of the budget that is actually being transferred. In any event, any revenue sharing agreement would have to be agreed upon by both the Board of Supervisors and the School Board, so we'll see how the discussion goes.

Why I Oppose Expanding Our Elderly Tax Relief Program, and Why It Matters for Everyone Else

For those that don't know, Loudoun County has a program to provide property tax relief for elderly and disabled residents. The idea is give relief to those who have lived here a long time and seen the value of their homes (and tax bills) skyrocket, which becomes difficult to manage on a fixed income. It is a very good program, and also a generous one.

Under the current criteria, a full real estate tax exemption is granted when the following four criteria are met: the owner must be 65 years or older or be totally disabled, the home is occupied as the sole dwelling, combined gross income cannot exceed \$72,000, and combined net worth cannot exceed \$440,000 (excluding the value of the home and up to ten acres). Loudoun County already has the highest income limit among neighboring localities; and along with Fauquier County, has the highest net worth limit as well.

The Board is now considering making it even more generous by expanding the net worth criteria, and I voted against this proposal which ended up passing on a 5-3 vote. Here's why I voted against it, and I why I think all of you should participate in the public process.

The changes proposed would create a cap on the value of the home at \$1 million. Creating a cap on home value is a step in the right direction, but I think the cap is much too high. However, the proposal then would expand the net worth criteria from \$440,000 until to \$900,000. Specifically, net worth up to \$450,000 would qualify for 100% relief. If the net worth was in the range of \$450,000.01 - \$600,000, one could apply for 75% tax relief. If the net worth was in the range of \$600,000.01 - \$750,000, one could apply for 50% tax relief. And, if the net worth was in the

range of \$750,000.01 - \$900,000, one could apply for 25% tax relief. Those with a net worth of \$900,000 would not qualify.

Under the existing program, an individual over the age of 65 could have a home worth millions, an income of up to \$72,000 per household, and a net worth of up to \$440,000, and their property tax bill would be zero. Under the new program, the house can “only” be worth \$1 million, but tax relief will be provided for higher net worths. The idea is to not punish though who are drawing on a 401K and don’t receive a government pension, but I have a number of concerns.

First, how we can justify giving any kind of tax relief to someone with a \$900,000 home, a \$70,000 salary and a net worth over \$750,000? We’re an affluent community, for sure, but our expenses are very high. I know many younger people who aren’t able to save much of anything, or who are struggling to pay college tuition for their children. Where is their tax relief? Where is the tax relief for all the other lower income individuals who own property and struggle to pay taxes on it?

Second—and of particular importance—revenue is a zero sum game. The Commissioner of Revenue is unable to provide even an estimate of the cost of expanding this program, because it is not possible to tell how many people qualify. If we’re going to exempt more people from having to pay taxes, then that money has to be made up elsewhere. Guess where? Every other property owner! So in effect, we’re going to have to raise taxes on everyone else in order to expand this program—because we know that our expenses as a County aren’t going to go down purely as a result of how much we’re growing.

I made an alternate motion to send this item to the FY2016 budget process, because I do not think that we should be making any decisions on this outside of the normal fiscal process. My motion failed on a 3-5-1 vote, with Supervisor Higgins and Supervisor Delgaudio joining me in support.

The good news from my perspective is that this is not a done deal. While I opposed the motion, the Board voted (6-2-1) to send the item to a public hearing in order to get input and finalize the ordinance. Several of my colleagues that supported the motion indicated they had some concerns with it and may not ultimately support it. I encourage everyone to participate in the public hearing and public input process on this item. Those who have concerns about County revenue—for schools, public safety, etc—should certainly be paying attention.

I certainly do want to make Loudoun a welcoming place for our older citizens. I took on the challenge of getting a permanent, full size senior center built in South Riding and that project is now underway. But I think this effort simply goes too far. I’ve heard from some who feel that seniors are moving out of Loudoun, yet I don’t think that’s the case. We have 55+ communities that are selling out months in advance and the Board continues to receive applications for more. Most recently, we received an application for a new combined independent living, assisted living and memory care facility in the Dulles District.

Board of Supervisors Grants New Property Tax Moratoriums for Nonprofits

As a result of another ordinance change that I also opposed, the Board of Supervisors decided to lift the existing moratorium on taxation for non-profits, and set up a process for non-profits to apply for tax relief. I opposed lifting the moratorium because I thought that without very specific, equally applied criteria, the County should not be picking and choosing which organizations received tax breaks and which didn't.

In September, the Board granted exemptions to 21 organizations. Many of these organizations do wonderful work and are valuable members of the community. Most of the most prominent already receive direct grants from Loudoun County government. The Board granted all the exemptions that were applied for with the exception of Wikimedia Foundation, which runs Wikipedia. In my view, however, there were some other organizations that do not provide direct support for Loudoun citizens that did receive the tax break—hence my concern about the lack of actual criteria. In any event, I rarely abstain from a vote, but I did so on the motion to grant these particular exemptions. I do not support the underlying process and am particularly uncomfortable with the lack of criteria, so I felt that it would be impossible for me to vote on that motion. The motion passed 7-0-1-1, with Supervisor Delgaudio opposed.

Economic Development

Pursuing Foreign Investment Opportunities

As chairman of the Board's Economic Development Committee, I oversee Loudoun's efforts to attract new businesses. We have made great strides over the past few years and have an excellent team that is getting great results. But there are still huge opportunities that we aren't taking advantage of, particularly in the area of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). To help introduce this topic to my colleagues and the public, I hosted a panel on FDI at this month's Economic Development Committee meeting. We had an official from the U.S. Department of Commerce, a key player in Seattle's successful FDI initiative that I had previously met while working on this issue, a local Loudoun business leader who has tapped into international markets, a German CEO who is setting up his North American HQ in Loudoun, and a representative from George Mason's Mason Enterprise Center. FDI could mean investment in real estate ventures, such as large projects around Metro stations that would bring employers, or it could be companies opening up offices here. The next steps will be the completion of the international business development strategy that we've been working on, and a deeper look at the various organizational models that other localities have used to pursue foreign investment. I'm planning to bring this topic back to the committee in January 2015 once those steps have been completed. There's a perception that these efforts, which sometimes involve foreign travel, are a frivolous expense, but that has been disproven time and time again by other jurisdictions that have made these investments. We need not look any further than our neighbors in Fairfax County, which has a major international program, to see the revenue that foreign investment generates for their community.

Washington 2024

Although it is ten years away, work is well underway to pick the host city for the 2024 Summer Olympic Games. The Washington region is putting together a very serious, well thought out

bid. The effort was unveiled at the September 10 Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments Board of Directors meeting, where we heard from Chairman Russ Ramsey (former chairman of the George Washington University Board and a major investor) and Vice Chair Ted Leonsis (owner of the Washington Capitals, Wizards and Verizon Center), who are leading these efforts. I had a follow up call with event organizers to talk a little more specifically about Loudoun's role, and we're planning to have organizers come to a Board of Supervisors meeting in the near future.

While the initial thoughts about something like this are usually focused on traffic and expense, I think this is something worth very serious exploration. The last Summer Olympics in London was actually profitable for the host city, and congestion was never really an issue (and they have bigger problems than we do!) The IOC is revising some of the requirements which will reduce some of the financial burden. Loudoun would be a natural fit for some of the events, and of course Dulles Airport would play a major role. My personal feeling is that the Washington region could really benefit from something unifying like this that would really put us on the map as a world class destination and change some of the negative perceptions.

The USOC is evaluating three other cities—Boston, San Francisco and Los Angeles. The decision on the US finalist will be made in early 2015. The USOC still has to decide whether it will bid at all, but if they do (likely), the IOC will make a final decision in 2017. Stay tuned.

Dulles District

Transportation and Road Improvements

My office always has quite a few ongoing traffic issues we're working on. This is not an exhaustive list, but touches on a few of the ones that have gotten the most public interest over the last month or so.

Rt. 50 Reconstruction

Many of you have been quite pleased about the improvements on Route 50 eastbound. The opening of the third lane has made a noticeable difference and especially helped soften the blow in the back to school weeks, which are traditionally the worst of the year.

However, I've heard from some—and noticed myself—that delays seem to be getting worse at the 50 East/28 North interchange. This is a poorly designed intersection utilized the old "cloverleaf" designed which is no longer being constructed at new interchanges. There are several choke points. Unfortunately, there are no major capital projects that are going to fix this, so I have asked VDOT to start working on some spot improvements, potentially involving lane markings at the merge point. I will also raise this in my capacity as Vice Chairman of the Route 28 Transportation Improvement District Commission (the entity that controls the special tax revenues that are collected by those in the 28 Improvement district).

In addition to that issue, there's still a lot of work to be done on Route 50, including (obviously) the west bound lanes, and the construction of new signals and "straightening out" of the

eastbound lanes. Lane closures are still going to be a way of life during non-peak hours for the next few months. However, I have received no indications that the timeline set forward by VDOT for westbound improvements—the end of 2014—is in jeopardy. Consider no news good news in that regard.

Rt. 50 Traffic Signals

With all of the construction going on in this corridor, signal timing continues to be an issue. In response to constituent concerns, I asked VDOT signal operations to examine the Poland Road and Gum Spring/Gateway Village Place intersections. Adjustments have recently been made to both. In the case of Gum Spring/Gateway Village, some problems with the sensors were discovered.

Ryan Road/Loudoun County Parkway Traffic Signal

This intersection has continued to see an increase of traffic. Unfortunately, I receive complaints from both drivers being delayed on Loudoun County Parkway and on Ryan Road. The Loudoun County Parkway side of this intersection is seeing a lot more traffic due to rapid building in the new sections of Loudoun Valley Estates and the opening of Rock Ridge High School. I asked VDOT to take a fresh look at traffic counts, and they decided to make some adjustments to reflect the new volume on Loudoun County Parkway.

Braddock Road Improvements

This project was to install a latex based surface treatment to prevent cracks and potholes. The application of this product was fairly complex and could only be done under certain conditions. VDOT indicated that the work itself was sporadic on purpose, because crews were rotating between multiple locations and the material had to sit for a certain time. However, reinstallation of the pavement markings was taking an inordinate amount of time, and I was forced to complain about it a few times before a crew was pulled in to get it done (at least between the County line and Loudoun County Parkway).

Riding Center Drive

Residents that live along Riding Center Drive have had concerns about speed and the safety of the intersections. These were exacerbated recently by an accident at Riding Center Drive and Ulysses. We will be prepared to talk about Riding Center at my town hall on the 7th for those that want to engage further. VDOT has spent a lot of time looking at this street, and it remains a focus area for the Sheriff's Office. There are not easy solutions, particularly when drivers do things like fail to stop at stop signs. As we will discuss, there is no particular pattern for the incidents that we've seen—no one root cause or easy "fix" that can be made. As it currently stands, VDOT is determining whether a new speed limit study is warranted. Speed limit studies are generally done before a road is turned over to VDOT to match the engineering of the road with the speed limit. The previous speed study was responsible for setting the speed limit at 35 mph, which is what the road was designed for. As I mentioned earlier, VDOT will have a representative at the Town Hall meeting to speak in more detail about this.

Belmont Ridge Road Between Truro Parish Drive and Croson Lane

It is always nice to see action moving forward on Board-funded projects. In this case, the Board just awarded a contract for the widening of Belmont Ridge Road between Truro Parish and Croson. As part of this project, a traffic signal will be installed at Belmont and Croson. Supervisor Williams and I jointly pursued a warrant study for the intersection last year, and the study found that a signal is needed. It will take about a year to get the signal installed—which is unfortunately typical for the process on these and almost entirely out of the County’s control.

Transit Update

East Gate Park and Ride

As I mentioned last month, work has begun on the East Gate Park and Ride Lot located on Tall Cedars Parkway near the intersection with Edgewater Street. The East Gate Park and Ride currently includes a 218 space park and ride lot as well as a rectangle athletic field with 63 additional parking spaces. Construction will be on-going; however I have requested that County staff brief Board Members at the October Finance and Government Services Operations Committee on the possibility of delaying the development of the athletic field. Considering how popular bus service has been, it may make more sense to add more parking spaces instead of adding the field—or at least retaining the option to do this down the road. Given the development costs of the field—which are in the hundreds of thousands—I don’t want to spend that money and then end up with a parking lot at capacity with no ability to expand. The details on service from this lot are still to be determined, however it is my hope to provide service to the Silver Line from this location.

Additional Long-Haul Buses Purchased

Some good news regarding the much-utilized long haul service. Our staff was able to negotiate a reasonable purchase price for three used coach buses that previously were serving the Washington Flyer system. With the opening of the Wiehle Avenue station, service to Dulles Airport has shifted to transit-style buses instead of the long haul coach buses. The Board of Supervisors approved the purchase at our last meeting. The buses have more than 2/3rds of their remaining life on them. It will take some time to get them converted to LC Transit buses, but when they are ready they will help alleviate overcrowding on existing services. We have not yet determined exactly where they will be deployed, but I’m well aware of the issues at Dulles South. The ability to deal with that situation will depend somewhat on the timing of the new park and ride lot down the street from the existing one in Stone Ridge.

Alder Center for Caring

Earlier this month, I had the opportunity to tour the New Alder Center for Caring, a new hospice and palliative care center on Millstream Drive in Stone Ridge. The Adler Center initially will provide a home like setting for 14 hospice patients (with capacity up to 21, pending state

approval). The lower floor of the facility is an outpatient pain management clinic that will also serve the hospice patients. The first hospice patients checked in a few weeks ago and the clinic began seeing patients this summer. Obviously, end of life situations are extremely difficult to think about, but I was very impressed with the facility and the mission of the Center. The land for the facility was donated by Van Metre, and they are actively seeking partnerships within the Stone Ridge community (there is already a relationship with the Gum Spring Library, for instance). I'd like to welcome the Adler Center to the Dulles District and our community.

Final Section of Stone Ridge Approved

The final piece of Stone Ridge was approved by the Board of Supervisors in September. The last section is known as Stone Ridge East II and Community Corner, and it will be 80 units along the pending new section of Tall Cedars Parkway just east of Gum Spring Road. There are some benefits to the community from this application. Given my reluctance to support rezoning commercial property to residential, Van Metre elected to develop the commercial piece of this project as a small retail center, with potential drive through uses. The other main selling point is the ability for the County to work with Van Metre on construction of Tall Cedars. We're having some difficulty with some of the other parcels involved in this project. Given the prior density in the area, I felt that the best thing overall was for this final parcel to be part of Stone Ridge rather than a small, standalone community. Doing so will ensure visual conformity with the surrounding community and should improve the feel along Gum Spring Road approaching Route 50.

Announcements

New Interactive Map Launched

The Board of Supervisors has been working with the County's Department of Transportation and Capital Infrastructure to launch a new, interactive map that provides details on the improvement projects happening in Loudoun County. The information will be constantly updated as projects progress, giving you a better idea of what is happening when. Take some time to explore the map and track the progress that we're making: <http://logis.loudoun.gov/cip/>.

Friends of the Gum Spring Library Art Auction

The Friends of the Gum Spring Library will host their annual fundraiser on Saturday, November 11 at 7:00pm. This year's theme is "Painting The Night Fantastic: a Novel Winetasting." The event will be held at the Gum Spring Library and will include live and silent auctions, door prizes, wine tasting, and hors d'oeuvres. The guest speaker will be local artist Joan Gardiner. Admission is \$15.00 a person or \$20.00 a couple. For more information, please call Tricia Haneghan (703-327-4328) or Janet Lynd (703-542-7354).

Dulles South Food Pantry

The Dulles South Food Pantry is a multi-faith emergency food pantry. They provide nutritious food, personal supplies and other services to those in need in Dulles South and the surrounding

area that come to them regardless of income, faith or other criteria. They are an all-volunteer organization focused both on feeding the hungry and promoting the self-sufficiency of those they serve. Donations to the Dulles South Food Pantry are tax deductible.

The Dulles South Food Pantry needs canned chicken & tuna; soups and stews with protein; 2 or 5 lbs. bags of rice or rice mixes; pasta; boxed potatoes; breakfast cereal and pancake mix; granola bars; fruit (in cans, plastic or dried); canned beans; pasta sauce (no glass please); seasoning packets; toothpaste; shampoo; and grocery store gift cards in any amount. They are now able to accept food donations at Dulles South Multipurpose Center located at 24950 Riding Center Drive in South Riding, Virginia during business hours.

The Dulles South Food Pantry is open to distribute food the 1st, 3rd and 5th Wednesdays of the month from 5 pm to 8 pm located at 24757 Evergreen Mill Road, Dulles VA 20166.

For additional information please visit their website at <http://www.dsfp.org/>.